

RFE

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Iron-curtain listeners await verdict on Radio Free Europe

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A Romanian university student writes: "Radio Free Europe has succeeded in winning over the youth of this country."

A Bulgarian listener to the Munich-based station sends this message: "I am grateful to Radio Free Europe not only for the information I have received. Under a totalitarian Communist regime that has appropriated all the mass information media and filled the people with fear, the announcement 'This is Radio Free Europe' is a ray of light illuminating the path leading to freedom and the truth, freedom of the spirit."

The Bulgarian sent his letter from Trieste. He might have been arrested if he had sent it from home where censorship of foreign mail prevails.

Indeed the American-financed radio station gets most of its fan mail from listeners who manage to travel to Western Europe or Yugoslavia.

Waiting on Congress

For more than a year, the staff of Radio Free Europe here has been wondering if Congress would cut off its financing, putting it off the air. Then the remarkable flow of letters from its listeners in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria would cease.

The reason for the concern has been an attack by Sen. J. W. Fulbright (D) of Arkansas, chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee, on RFE and its sister station beaming programs to the Soviet Union, Radio Liberty.

Senator Fulbright has charged that the two stations are "keeping alive the animosities which grew up after World War II." They should, he said, "be given an opportunity to take their rightful place in the graveyard of cold-war relics."

Nixon backing

Through his committee position, the Senator has blocked funding of the stations beyond June of this year.

But President Nixon backs the stations. "The comprehensive news and comment which East Europeans get from RFE," he has said, "help immensely to neutralize the censorship of speech and press that is still imposed under Communist rule."

Last May President Nixon appointed a five-man commission under Dr. Milton Eisenhower to "review the alternative arrangements for providing future government support" to the two stations.

That report is due by the end of this month and may already be in the hands of the White House. RFE executives believe it will propose a favorable solution to the financing problem. But they say they do not know details.

Senator Fulbright, it is believed here, has modified his complete opposition to the stations. He now holds that Radio Free Europe should be financed from Europe — not the United States.

Ralph E. Walter, director of RFE, believes such a switch would amount to a death sentence for the stations. He does not think the \$44 million annual operating costs of the stations would be provided by West European governments.

Even if it was, he figures they would insist on some control over the program content.

"I have met no one who thinks you could work this out in a satisfactory way," he told the Monitor.

Nevertheless, Mr. Walter has helped organize a group of West Europeans interested in the financing problem of the stations.

"But no large sums are likely to be available," he cautions. Any West European money would likely come from private sources rather than governments.

The financing problems of the two stations stems partially from the disclosure a few

Comments Noel Bernard, director of RFE's Romanian broadcasting department: "We are the national radio system in Romania. We are more listened to than Radio Bucharest."

Romania does not jam RFE. Nor does Hungary, though some weak interference comes from a Soviet jammer.

But Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland do attempt to blot out RFE and other Western broadcasters. Depending on atmospheric conditions, the programs often still can be heard. With the availability of portable radios, East Europeans will often listen in the countryside where the jamming does not reach.